

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AB-31 (Sub. No. 37X)

Grand Trunk Western Railroad Incorporated - Abandonment Exemption - in Oakland County, Michigan

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Grand Trunk Western Railroad Incorporated (GTW) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of a line of railroad known as the North Pontiac Spur, spanning 2.36 miles in Pontiac, Oakland County, Michigan. The North Pontiac Spur (the line) consists of two connected segments. The first segment extends from milepost 2.39 to milepost 2.49 at Belt Junction on the Pontiac Belt Line and continues from that point, which is also milepost 38.46 on the Romeo Subdivision, to the end of the track at milepost 37.7 near Joslyn Avenue on the Romeo Subdivision. The second segment begins at milepost 2.75 on the Cass City Subdivision, crosses over the first segment and extends to the end of the track at milepost 1.25, which is near Montcalm Street. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

The line is located in an urban, industrial area. The right-of-way of the Cass City Subdivision is about 50 feet wide, while the right-of-way of the Romeo Subdivision ranges from 66 feet to 180 feet in width. The General Motors Corporation (GM) Pontiac Plant borders the line east of the Cass City Subdivision and south of the Romeo Subdivision. West of the Cass City Subdivision portion of the line is a residential area, and north of the Romeo Subdivision is a commercial and residential area. A municipal park borders the line north of the east end of the Romeo Subdivision.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroad has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have investigated and reviewed the record in this proceeding.

Transportation

GTW states that it currently provides service over the Cass City Subdivision portion of the line for the GM plant by shipping about 2,000 carloads of outbound finished steel and metal parts per year. Traffic on the line is once a day, six days a week. GTW plans to transfer the trackage and right-of-way of the line to GM, who will relocate and reconfigure the trackage to improve plant operations and safety. GTW states that the traffic on the line will remain the same after the proposed abandonment, and that no traffic will be diverted to alternate modes of transportation.

GTW indicates that the grade crossings on the line will be maintained and will remain operational after the proposed abandonment. GTW owns one public highway grade crossing on the line that has flashers and gates. GM owns two crossings on the line. One is also a public highway crossing that has flashers, and the other is a private drive crossing that has flashers and gates.

Land Use

Comments have been received from the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service stating the proposed abandonment will have no adverse effects on prime and unique farmland.

Comments have been received from the Army Corps of Engineers stating that the area proposed for abandonment is no longer under its jurisdiction.

Comments have been received from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) stating that the area for proposed abandonment is not within Michigan's coastal management boundary, and that the proposed abandonment will not adversely impact coastal resources. DEQ indicates that it needs additional information to determine whether wetlands are present in the abandonment area and if so, whether salvage activities will impact wetlands, which would require GTW to obtain state permits.

Biological Resources

Comments have been received from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources stating that the proposed abandonment will not cause impacts on natural resources in the area.

Comments have been received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) stating that there are no endangered, threatened, proposed, or candidate species, or critical habitat within the area proposed for abandonment.

Historic Properties

Comments have been received from the Michigan Department of State Michigan Library and Historical Center stating that the proposed abandonment will not affect any historic properties.

CONDITIONS

Based on the comments we have received to date, we recommend the following condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has indicated that it needs additional information to determine whether wetlands are present in the abandonment area and if so, whether salvage activities will impact wetlands, which would require GTW to obtain state permits. Therefore, we recommend that prior to salvage of the rail line, GTW must consult with DEQ to determine whether any wetlands are present and whether any state wetlands protection permits are required.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended conditions are imposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of the petition for exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Rini Ghosh, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-31 (Sub-No. 37X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Rini Ghosh at (202) 565-1539.

Date made available to the public: **March 23, 2001**

Comment due date: April 20, 2001 (30 Days)

By the Board, Elaine K. Kaiser, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

MAP TO BE SCANNED